

Overview of the BRC Global Standards

All sectors involved with the supply of retailer branded products including the Retailers themselves, have a legal obligation to undertake all practical precautions and exercise all due diligence in order to avoid failure of products at all stages of production, from development right down to the sale and advertising of the product to the consumer especially in the food sector (Food Safety Act 1990). Under section 21 of the FSA the definition of the 'due diligence' defence is as follows:-

“...it shall...be a defence for the person charged to prove that he took all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to avoid the commission of the offence by himself or by a person under his control”

Retailers aimed to achieve this legal obligation by following a number of activities, one of which was the verification of the technical performances at food production sites via audits. For many years, each retailer carried out audits based on their individually, internally designed standards. Retailers carried out their audits in some instances by their in house technologists, and in other cases by third party inspection bodies. This led to lots of confusion and misunderstandings between the production sites and each individual Retailer and their method of auditing, as there was no standard approach in how the Retailers and production sites conformed.

The development of such Standards was initially, but it was quickly seen as having significant benefits to the manufacturers and suppliers of products to the UK Retailers..

Work on the BRC Food Technical Standard began in 1996 driven by the need to meet the legislative requirements, which culminated in the publication of the first issue of the Standard in October 1998. For the first time UK Retailers, working within a highly competitive market place, had realised that food safety is a non-competitive issue and that by sharing experience and developing robust systems together, there were distinct advantages legally, technically and financially. Nowadays, most large UK retailers will only consider business with manufacturers and suppliers of products who have gained certification to the appropriate BRC Standard

Following the success of the BRC Food Technical Standard there has been continued co-operation between UK Trade Bodies, with the encouragement of the UK Government, to develop an approach to a number of issues such as the Genetically Modified Food Ingredients and control parameters within the Food Packaging Industry.

The British Retail Consortium has actively been involved with the development and implementation of Standards since 1996. There are four globally recognised BRC Standards currently available:

- BRC Global Standard - Food
- BRC Global Standard - Consumer Products
- The BRC/IOP Technical Standard and Protocol for Companies Manufacturing and Supplying Food Packaging Materials for Retailer Branded Products (BRC/IOP Packaging Standard)

- BRC/FDF Technical Standard for the Supply of Identity Preserved Non-Genetically Modified Food Ingredients and Product (BRC/FDF IP Standard)

The BRC Standards were created under the leadership of the BRC and its members. Contributions towards the standards came from: -

- Representatives from major retailers
- Manufacturers
- Certification bodies
- UKAS
- Trade associations

In addition, on each successive review and revision, BRC consulted extensively with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure acceptability and integrity of the Standards in the industry.

Benefits of the BRC Global Standards

The major business benefit of the BRC Global Standards is that by dealing with suppliers who have achieved BRC Certification, customers can be assured that they are dealing with a company that reaches high levels of competence in business-critical areas such as product safety, quality and legality. There are a number of other benefits arising from the implementation of the BRC Global Standards-Food, which are:

- A single standard and protocol, allows evaluation to be carried out by Certification Bodies, who are accredited against the European standard EN45011 (ISO/IEC Guide 65)
- Single verification commissioned by the Supplier, in line with an agreed evaluation frequency, will allow Suppliers to report upon their status to those customers recognising the Standard
- The Standard is comprehensive in scope covering all areas of product safety and legality
- The Standard addresses part of the due diligence requirements of both the supplier and the retailer
- Within the Evaluation Protocol, there is a requirement for ongoing surveillance and confirmation of follow up of corrective actions on non conformances
- As Certification Bodies are accredited against European standard, there can be recognition of accredited Certification Bodies in countries where product is sourced
- Underpins and maintains confidence
- Assures a national assessment system
- Improves consistency
- Enables international acceptance
- Reduces risk
- Provides transparency
- Provides reassurance

Certification Bodies

Once an organisation is confident that they comply with the BRC Standard, they can apply for Certification. This requires an evaluation to be carried out by a Certification Body.

It is a requirement that evaluation undertaken against a BRC Standard shall be carried out by Certification Bodies formally accredited to the European Standard EN 45011 (ISO/IEC Guide 65:1996). To comply with EN 45011, Certification Bodies must be independent of the organisations and activities they are evaluating, whilst the evaluators must have technical competence, including appropriate qualifications, training, and experience for the specific product categories.

In addition, evaluations must be effectively supervised by competent staff following documented policies and procedures, and client confidentiality must be ensured.

Formal accreditation of a Certification Body can only be granted by a National Accreditation Body. Formal approval can only be granted by the BRC.

In Great Britain, the Accreditation Body is the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS). In other countries, this will include National Accreditation Bodies, who are members or associate members of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF), European Co-operation for Accreditation (EA) and signatories to the bi-lateral or multilateral agreements in respect to EN 45011 (ISO Guide 65).

Accreditation will only be awarded by the National Body after a detailed assessment has found that the Certification Body complies with all of the criteria of EN 45011. This assessment will include both quality systems and site assessment of the work of individual evaluators

There are two types of organisation in relation to certification which can carry out BRC audits:

- **Certification bodies recognised by the BRC**

Those companies who have been, or are being accredited by a national Accreditation Body **who have provided demonstrable evidence of working to criteria** accepted by the BRC, and **demonstrate equivalence of process**.

- **Certification bodies seeking recognition by the BRC**

Those companies who have been, or are being, accredited by a national Accreditation Body **who cannot, or have yet to provide**, evidence of working to criteria accepted by the BRC, and therefore are **unable to demonstrate equivalence of process**

PLEASE NOTE: Either of these types of Certification Body can carry out BRC certifications. You should check with your customer regarding whether they accept the Certification Body you wish to appoint.

Steps to become BRC Certified

If you have been asked by your customer to gain certification to a BRC Standard, here are the steps that you will need to go through:

1) Order a copy of the Standard and assess the compliance of your site to its guidelines. You can order a copy of the BRC Global Standard-Food by the following web link:

<http://www.brc.org.uk/standards/ordering.htm>

2) Select an accredited Certification Body to carry out the evaluation on your site from the list on the BRC Website (the Certification Bodies shaded in grey are recognised by the BRC):

<http://www.brcglobalstandards.com>

3) Prepare for evaluation

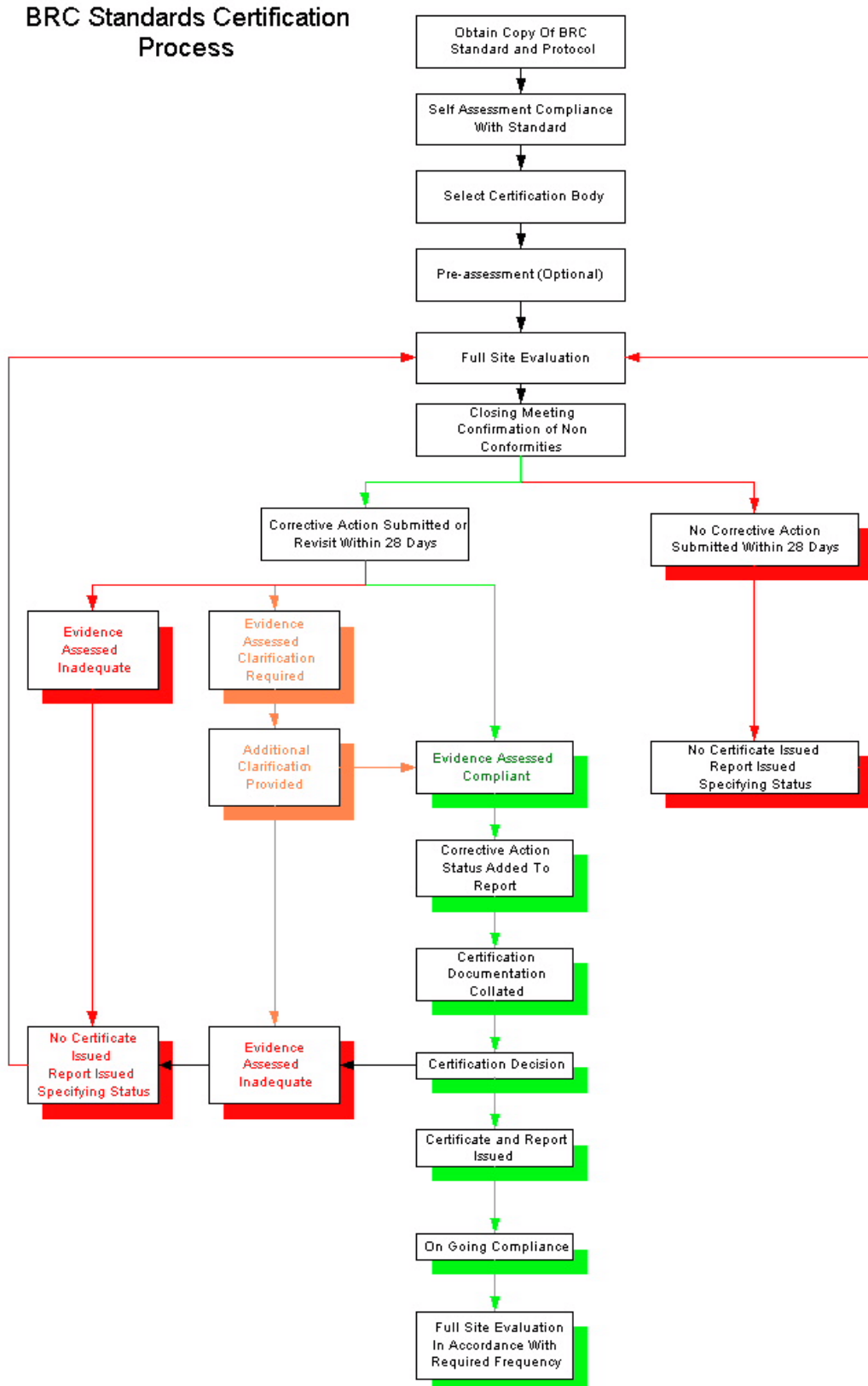
4) Site evaluation

5) If applicable, carry out corrective action program for any non-conformances

5) Certification Body decision on certification or non-certification made known

7) Issue of report or certificate (if applicable)

Fig 1. A flow diagram of the BRC Certification Process



In *fig 1*, it describes the main steps in getting BRC Certified and the order of events in becoming certified. The time duration to attain BRC Certification will depend upon the competency of the company and their state of readiness. We would recommend that an assessment be made before commissioning an evaluation. Ideally, your company should follow the steps highlighted in green to ensure that they are certified in the most quickest and cost effective manner.

Cost to become BRC Certified

The BRC system is based on open market principles and the choice of Certification Body rests between your company and the companies you supply. All recognised Certification Bodies have attained accreditation against a common standard requirement (EN45011), which provides confidence in equivalence. Therefore, the cost is not dictated by BRC but is open to market forces.

Other Requirements

Your company needs to discuss with each of your customer about whether other requirements are needed in order to trade with the supermarket chains.

Training

To assist retailers and their suppliers in their implementation of the BRC Global Standards, the BRC has used its expertise to develop a range of training courses based on the content of the Technical Standards. Attending will allow delegates to gain a deeper understanding of the practical implementation of the Standards to carry out their principles and to see the Standards from an auditor's point of view. Further information regarding this can be found on the following link: <http://www.brc.org.uk/brctrading/training.htm>